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ABSTRACT

This guide describes the many ways to teach bias reduction and violence prevention in order to help schools, community and religious leaders, and parents decide which project is best for their children. Some projects concentrate on changing behaviors, while others concentrate on changing attitudes as a prelude to changing behavior. Some projects assume that the cause of prejudice is the same regardless of who is targeted. These programs focus on reduction of prejudice, bias, and violence. Other programs focus on teaching conflict resolution and mediation skills as bias reduction techniques. Most anti-bias projects also deal with violence as a way to express hatred, emphasizing either changing behaviors to result in attitude change, or changing attitudes to bring about behavior change. Training methods and targeted groups vary among projects. These should be examined by the person selecting a project, as should costs, services, and philosophies. Parents can support anti-bias training for youth by getting community support and participating in school and community programs. (SLD)

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A COMMUNITY GUIDE TO YOUTH ANTI-BIAS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAMS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Our country is becoming more ethnically and culturally diverse. To protect the well-being of both majority and minority groups, people must get along with each other in school, at work, and in the community. Given the easier access to more powerful weapons, the results of violent reactions to hatred can be deadly.

Many schools are calling on the services of anti-bias projects to teach youth (and, sometimes, their parents and others in the community) to solve conflicts nonviolently, get control over their anger, and develop respect for each other's differences.

This guide describes the many ways to teach bias reduction and violence prevention in order to help schools, community and religious leaders, and parents decide which project is best for their children.

Project Philosophies

Some projects take the practical position that people in a diverse society simply must learn how to keep from acting on their prejudices. They believe that once people become used to controlling their public expressions of hatred, they will naturally become more broad-minded.

Other projects have the reverse perspective—that changes in people's behavior follow changes in attitude. These projects try to change people's beliefs.

Issues Covered

Most training projects and their trainers (who act as teachers) deal with all the issues described below, but they do this in different ways.

Prejudice, Bias, and Discrimination Reduction

Some projects assume that the cause of prejudice is the same regardless of who is targeted. They help people to stop victimizing other individuals or groups. A few

projects also talk to students about working for social and political changes to increase equality in this country.

Other projects look at bias almost on a case-by-case basis, explaining reasons why certain groups are most often treated badly, and correcting false information about them. These projects are usually a part of a larger organization that helps meet the needs of an individual ethnic or cultural group. While they focus on discrimination against their own group, most also talk about bias generally.

Conflict Resolution and Mediation

These projects focus on teaching conflict resolution and mediation skills, believing that bias will be reduced the same way that other conflicts are settled. They deal with prejudice as just one cause of conflict among many. While traditional mediation helps both sides get something they want in the settlement, these projects will not let a settlement include the continuation of behavior based on bias, because they are committed to social justice as well as to meeting the needs of the people in conflict.

Violence Prevention

The majority of anti-bias projects deal with violence as just one way to show hatred, and expect it to decrease as biases decrease. On the other hand, a few projects believe that people with negative emotions can be taught not to let them influence how they act, so they will behave less violently and cause fewer conflicts. These projects emphasize control over emotions, especially anger.

Other projects believe that changes in behavior, such as refusing to act violently, will lead to better emotional control. They usually also treat conflict resolution and violence prevention separately, teaching students to head off or avoid violent confrontations, regardless of their cause, without attempting to settle the dispute. Changing attitudes toward violence and weapons in general is at the heart of this approach.

Training Methods

Projects use their own trainers and resource materials, but the mix varies. At one end are programs based almost totally on what happens between trainers and students. Trainers base their teaching on what students say during role play and group discussion. A few programs always use multicultural training teams.

At the other end are projects that rely on printed and audiovisual materials. Their program is set in advance of meeting the students. Trainers act more like traditional classroom teachers, and students take a less active role in their learning. Some of these programs use trainers very little; instead, they give teachers instruction guides for teaching an anti-bias course themselves.

Most projects use a mix of methods; they do the teaching first, and then leave materials for teachers to use later. Some trainers make a return visit for follow-up and evaluation.

Targeted Student Groups

Projects focused on changing behavior usually teach only young people, or teach teachers to use an anti-bias curriculum without their first undergoing anti-bias training themselves.

Projects dealing with bias directly are more likely to work with school people, community members, and parents, as well as students, because they believe that all people have biases, although they may not even be aware of them. They assume that young people will be unable to get rid of their own prejudices if the adults around them keep showing prejudice. A few projects work only with the staffs of school systems and schools, thinking that unless the school people learn how to solve their

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own conflicts, they will not be able to teach students to do that.

Selecting a Project

Before deciding on a project, the philosophy, service packages, and costs of several projects should be looked at because there are so many differences among them. Some offer only a standard program package, while others let clients contract for only part of a program. Some sell print and audiovisual resources for do-it-yourself anti-bias training, while others make materials available only as part of their service package.

Most projects charge a fee for service (although some are subsidized by grants); in general the more complete programs with more materials to give to students, the higher the charge. While high project fees may seem impossible, the project may require fewer human and material resources from the school, which can help reduce the overall cost.

How Parents Can Help Reduce Youth Bias

Some schools and districts may need to hear that parents want youth conflict resolution and anti-bias training before they contract for it. Therefore, parents should get community support, from different cultural groups if possible, and then go to their school. They might suggest ways to fund a project (perhaps offering to help raise the money) and say they are willing to participate in the program themselves as a way to promote good relations between people in the community.

This guide is based on **Anti-Bias and Conflict Resolution Curricula: Theory and Practice**, *a digest written by Wendy Schwartz and published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. Please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the Clearinghouse for a copy of the digest and a list of other Clearinghouse publications.*

A companion to the guide is **A Directory of Anti-Bias Education Resources and Services**, *by Wendy Schwartz with Lynne Elcik. It contains profiles of 52 youth anti-bias projects, and an extensive list of anti-bias and violence prevention books, audiovisual materials, periodicals, curricula, and information sources. The* Directory *is published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, and is available from the Clearinghouse for $8.00, including handling charges.*

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Other guides to help parents help their children learn can be found on the National Parent Information Network (NPIN) on the Internet. You can reach the NPIN World Wide Web at http://ericps.ed.uiuc, or the NPIN Gopher at gopher://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu. Ask someone in your local library, your children's school, or your parent center how to see the information on this network.

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